MEETING PANCHO VILLA IN THE DAYS OF HIS GLORY

When the Bandit, Chief Now Hunted Through the Desert by United States Troops, Lived Amid Stolen Luxury and Seemed on His Way to the Presidency of Mexico

By JANE DIXON.

FUNNY how things come about. We were sitting in Sammy Dreben's personally conducted "Press Club" in the Sheldon Hotel, El Paso, Tex., reminiscing. A happy go lucky lot they were, those members, most of them newspaper men from the four corners of the country, covering the border for their papers or getting out the dope on the races over at the Juarez track for the sporting sections. They used to meet every evening just before dinner to decide who would be President of Mexico to-morrow and what the nosebag news was at the tracks. If they could get a line on a sure thing and pry a little loose change away from the corpulent roll of Izzy Ham, the czar of the bookmakers, it meant a fiesta, a special extra club session with trimmings.

Having doped out to-morrow's winner in Mexico and at the track they would romp over to the telegraph office, shoot the glad tidings to their papers and return to the club to see what they could stir up. Invariably something stirred.

On this evening, about a year ago, the talk was as usual of Mexico. Every man there, with a single exception, had seen service in one or other of the revolutions, with either the pen or the pistol. We had heard half a dozen regular red blood stories of adventure as told by two soldiers of fortune high in the service—Tex O'Reilly, 6 feet 4, of long, lean, Irish daredeviltry, and Sammy Dreben, short and sturdy and smiling, known the length of the border as "the fighting Jew."

"Ever hear about the time Tex and Jack Noonan, another fighting Irishman, started to invade Mexico?" asked Sammy. "It was one night during the Huerta regime, and we had an unusually hard night in the club.

"Along toward midnight Tex and Jack got full of bravery and drink. Both of them have fought for anywhere from three to twelve factions, and what they don't know about the Mexican as a soldier is a shame. Finally they reached the point where they were whispering behind their hands and acting mysteriously. We knew what that meant—something wild.

"Well, what do you think they pulled, in all seriousness too? They went out into the park here in the El Paso Square, stole a historic cannon that had seen service in the civil war and started to invade Mexico. They were thirty miles in the enemy's country with a couple of moth eaten pack mules and the bum cannon before they were captured and sent back across the bridge."

"How about the time you were working a machine gun in the Orozco revolution and Gen. ——" (naming a prominent Mexican commander) "ordered you shot for calling him a coward and you talked your way past the adobe wall?" retorted Tex.

"Well, he was a coward. He was one of those war babies that wouldn't stick with their troops. I figured that if I could afford to stand up there and do some plain and fancy fighting just for the fun of the thing there there was no reason why the General, who had a flock of haciendas and a lot of loot, should pick out a safe place for himself.

"Besides, I figured if he lost he would probably pin it on me and some of the other boys, and we'd get shot anyway. Things did look a little bad for a minute, when the firing squad focused their guns, but I guess the old boy was short of men and he decided it would be better to let the other side shoot at me."

"I'd like to get Villa's own story of his life," remarked John Wheeler, the sole exception to the service squad.

"If you mean that I'll get you a hearing with Villa and safe conduct to Guadalajara," said Gunther Lessing, attorney for the Villa interests in El Paso.

"If you get me a private car and let me make up a party I'll go you," was the challenge.

Now the challenge was meant as a joke, but it turned out to be serious enough. At the crack of dawn the next morning Mr. Lessing was knocking on the doors of drowsy correspondents, waving a signed order for a special car and instructions to civil and military authorities to accord the party every courtesy and assistance.

The car was the Mexico (pronounced Mehe'co) and belonged to Gen. Obregon, commander of the Carranza army. It had been captured during a battle and was at this time exhibit A in the private collection of Gen. Francisco Villa in Juarez. With it went a porter, who hailed from Georgia and confessed to the name Julius. The Mexican version of the name was "Hullo," but we called him Tom for short. Also there were two Mexican cooks who averaged 900 cigarettes a day each, and could cook chilli in more ways than Mr. Heinz can cook pickles.

A week later we embarked, ten strong, not counting Tom, the cooks and a fighting cock anchored to a barrel on the rear platform by means of a rope. Some one in the party had had the eleventh hour notion that he ought to enter a bird in the pits along the line and so study one of the favorite national sports from the inside. Before we got off the Villa bank in Juarez started its printing press and turned out many bales of pesos, amounting to about $5,000 in Mexican money. This they gave us to finance the trip. When it comes to hospitality the Mexican is king of them all.

We had gone as far south as Aguas Calientes when we received a message from Gen. Villa that there was a troop movement north and he would meet us in Torreon. So we swung onto the end of a troop train and started back.

As we were passing another of these trains on a siding one of the men in the party spied a pretty soldadera sitting on top of a box car cooking tortillas, a kind of pancake made of flour and water, for her soldado. He tossed her a cigarette. In a moment the back platform of our car was surrounded by a horde of soldiers howling for a smoke.

"I think if we had enough cigarettes we could steal the entire Mexican army," remarked the man who had fallen for the Mexican senorita. So urgent was the demand for smokes that he was compelled to retreat into the car and put up the safety bar to keep out the mob.

A young Captain rode with us to Zacatecas. He was very lonely and downhearted because, as he confided to Sammy, he had just sent his soldadera back to Guadalajara. He had met her there four days before and had persuaded her to go with him and become a camp follower. She was 15 years old, and she was afraid to ride on the wire netting stretched under the box cars, so he had to send her home. He doubted if he would ever see her again. There were plenty of women in the camp as young as she who could fight as well as the men, and who could steal all the food needed.

We were awakened in Torreon by shouts of "Viva Villa!" and the music of a military band blaring snatches of syncopation a la Irving Berlin, interspersed with Spanish fandango. The General's car was opposite ours on the next track. Charlie Chaplin couldn't have drawn a bigger crowd.

Long lines of cavalry were passing our windows. The men were mounted on horses that looked as if their ancestors were veterans of the crosstown car service. In their packs the men carried everything from kindling wood to babies.

Gen. Emilio Madero, brother of Francisco Madero, deposed and murdered President of Mexico, was commissioned to stage the first formal audience of the Americans with the man who had progressed from mountain bandit to heir apparent to the dictatorship of his country. Gen. Emilio has sometimes been called "the Fighting Madero," and those who have seen him in action declare he has earned the name.

Pancho Villa received us amid the click of typewriters in his office, an observation car. He wore a gray sweater that looked as if it might be the survivor of a hard football season. No tailor's iron had ever played tag with the creases in his trousers.

He spoke no English. His eyes were the eyes of a splendid animal, the pupils dilating and contracting constantly as do the pupils in the eyes of a panther. When he was introduced he said nothing for at least a minute. He looked through and back of your eyes, the leaping flames in his own blazing black eyes seeming to test the metal of your mind.

He told us he never drank liquor—it was the sleeping sickness of a man's soul. He wanted to liberate the poor peon, he said, to drag him from between the millstones where he was being ground in abject slavery by the hands of wealth and power. He had no education. He could write his own name, but if you stopped him in the middle of it he had to begin all over again. Would we like to see his bathroom?

Now this bathroom was the particular pride and pet of the man who might have conquered Mexico. It was one of the half dozen bathrooms in captivity in the entire country, if observation and persistent search count for anything. We said we'd have to be shown.

So we were led through several cars comprising the General's suite, to a box car in the rear of the train. One-half of this car was partitioned off into a sort of anteroom to the bath.

The piece de resistance of this lounge was a brass bed such as finds favor in the more ornate of the Harlem flats. Over it was spread a piece of fringed yellow and silver satin brocade, a poem in lovelliness. Scattered over the brocade were a number of hand embroidered slumber pillows with edgings and insertions of real lace. Nothing like the old bandit days in the mountains with a gun for a pillow, this. "For my siesta," explained Gen. Villa, indicating the brocade.

It seems that right after the big boss had his bath, which was in the middle of the day, it was his wont to stretch himself out for a snack of sleep. It really is a most worthy custom, the siesta, one we have too long overlooked.

The other half of the car boasted a white porcelain tub, a shower and hot and cold water. Gen. Villa turned on the faucets himself and made us feel the water to prove he wasn't romancing. Across the end of the car was a pianola. The pianola is not considered a bathroom requisite, even in the most modern metropolitan apartment, but the General had his own ideas about fixtures.

"I borrowed three of them," he explained, waving his hand toward the mahogany masterpiece. "I kept the best one and gave the two others away."

Here allow me to explain the significance of the word "borrow" as here used. When there is a battle in Mexico the victors go into the town and grab anything they want. Of course the General gets the pick of the plunder, the men taking what is left in order of their rank. This is called "borrowing." According to this code there are a lot of victors at large right here at home, men who grab things without the slightest intention of ever returning them. The idea is not original with Pancho and his pirates.

That afternoon a young Colonel who had been with Zapata in the south and had been called to Hacienda El Pilar, outside of Torreon, by Gen. Raoul Madero, another brother of Francisco, then Governor of Monterey, to see that all alfalfa from the rich fields came to the Villa army, entertained us in Sternau's, the Delmonico's of Mexico. Out in the court a native orchestra thrummed native music. Wine older than the Colonel was served in great china pitchers and poured into coarse coffee cups.

The lid was on tight in Torreon. For a week before Villa troops came to a city, while they were there and for a week after they left no liquor was sold. The wonderful golden grape we sipped out there in the sunlit courtyard was served by virtue of a special dispensation issued by the General himself. New Year's eve in New York had nothing on the Colonel. Since then Sternau's has been confiscated and closed by Carranza, who gave a banquet there, decided that Sternau overcharged him and kicked the restaurateur out of the country. New York restaurant men please take warning.

From Torreon to Monterey we travelled mostly on the floor of the cars to avoid collision with any Carranza bullets that might wander through the car windows. From Paredon three of the men of the party went to Saltillo to a Governor's banquet. They spent an entire day paging neckties for themselves, finally ferreting out three of the ready made kind that had been left over from a Christmas lot in Chicago.

The Governor had borrowed a swell palace for himself, but the three found they were all out of order. They had the only neckties at the table. The Governor had been a fireman on the railroad a few months before and did not go in for fine sartorial effects. It was cold and every one ate with his overcoat and hat on. The Governor complained because the food was a little slow in coming. He sent for the chef. For a half hour he sputtered at him.

"De Gov'ner sez if youse'll keep on your shirts youse'll have a bear of a feed," explained the chef at last. He was a Brooklyn hick.

The women at the banquet all sat along one side of the room and watched the men making merry at the table. When the orchestra played a dance the men chose their partners, went to them, stuck out their arms, paraded once around the room and danced around once more. Then they led the women back to their chairs and checked them. The women never said a word. I hope some of the suffragists will see this.

Gen. Raoul Madero entertained us at the Governor's palace in Monterey. They were selling water in the city by the carat. The day we left Gen. Madero went to the front at the head of 10,000 Villa troops. With him went one of our party, a tall, good looking typical Western correspondent for the Chicago *Tribune*, by name Floyd Gibbons.

Gibbons was a socialist at heart. His equipment consisted of a Mexican saddle, scenically perfect in carved leather and wrought silver. His mount was a speckled white horse about half as high as himself. The poor horse was all in, a dejected sight. We said a sad farewell, feeling that even the Mexicans could hardly miss the white war steed once they took to serious shooting. Gibbons was so exhilarated over the prospect of being in a battle that he would have ridden to the front on a goat.

On the way back we went through the Villa outposts. The official Mrs. Villa, called Luz, gave a luncheon for us at her house in Chihuahua city. It was a large, square, high ceilinged house with an inner court. The General had "borrowed" it from some exiled enemy.

We strolled up the front walk between gun racks holding two dozen rifles ready for action and manned by as many of the General's personal bodyguard. The first thing that greeted us inside the door was a life size picture of the lord and master of the domicile. It was Mrs. Villa's favorite picture of her war lord.

The official Mrs. Villa greeted us cordially. She is a plain, mild mannered woman with black hair and blue eyes. A crowd of beggars swarmed in front of the house. She sent a soldier out to them to distribute alms. A poor, wretched, hobbling hulk of a man in a soldier's uniform with a Villa button on his coat she had escorted to the cool shade of the veranda, where he could rest while the servants brought him food and drink. Her charities in the city were endless.

We waited in a pale blue and gold drawing room that might have been lifted from a French chateau, except for the artificial flowers scattered everywhere. Outside the garden was a wilderness of roses carpeted with purple violets, but they were spurned in favor of pink paper daisies and pale blue orchids.

"I met my General when I was a young girl in the mountains," said our hostess with a smile. "He is a great warrior. He is the savior of his country."

From a member of the household we heard that the General had met her in the little mountain village of San Andreas when he was a bandit, that he had taken her to a dance and had afterward carried her away behind him on his horse. Be that as it may, she is one of his most ardent and loyal supporters. She wore black and many jewels of all colors in heavy gold settings. These too were undoubtedly "borrowed." A platinum and diamond wrist watch clasped around her wrist looked as if it had just left Tiffany's. Somebody had made an unwilling loan.

The conspicuous person at the luncheon was little Elias, a tike of a boy given to the General and his wife along with an automobile, some horses, a lot of bric-a-brac and other plunder. Elias was the Czar of the Villa household. He reached about to your knee and his eyes looked like two black beads set in a fine case of summer tan. He wore a uniform that was an exact reproduction of the Villa dress uniform and when you met him he clicked his tiny boots together and saluted exactly like a toy automaton soldier. At table he ate interminable bananas, pounding on the table in high rage when the attendant was slow in executing his orders.

At a table adjoining sat four of the sixteen boys Gen. Villa was educating in a military school near Los Angeles. They were home for a vacation and Mrs. Villa was mothering them. They were devoted to her and Elias, anticipating their every wish.

Later we went in a "borrowed" automobile, a stunning big Pierce-Arrow of the latest design, to the new villa the General was building on the first piece of land he ever owned in Mexico. It was in the outskirts of one of the poorest sections of Chihuahua, surrounded by the adobe huts of peons. He called it Villa Luz after his wife. It was made up of fifty odd rooms, with stables for his favorite horses, garages, school rooms and secret stairways. On the roof 500 soldiers could be accommodated.

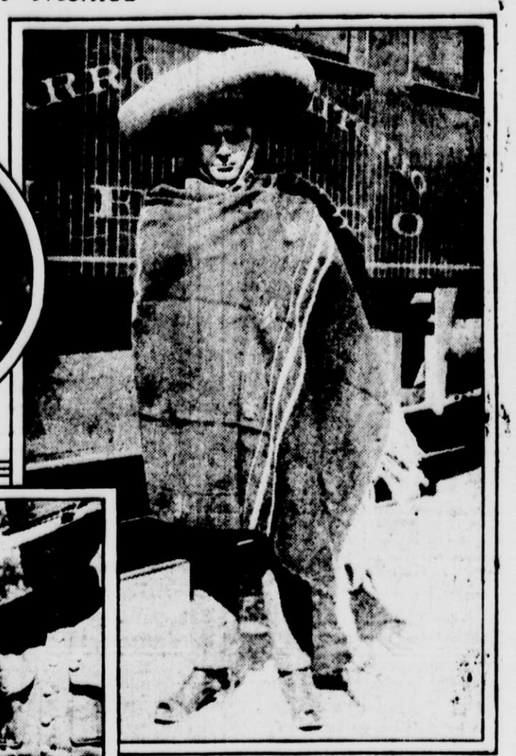
Nothing was left to the imagination in the way of decoration. If there was a pansy painted on the wall it was the size of a dinner plate. I have heard that the enemy has "borrowed" Villa Luz and is using it to stable horses. Its chatelaine and little Elias are exiles in Havana, where the General sent them with his brother for safe keeping. Before she occupied Villa Luz the reverses of the bandit leader had begun. Never have I received more lavish hospitality than in the home of Pancho Villa.

Leaving Chihuahua we passed a troop of machine gun men. The guns were mounted on mules. Sammy almost wept at sight of them and would have deserted but we feared the worst and locked him in a stateroom until we were out of the danger zone. Without his Spanish we might have been backed up against some convenient adobe wall and shot at sunrise. In fact, if we called on the bandit chief to-day the chances would all be in favor of the adobe wall. His is a case of a powerfully personality, a great dynamic force, gone wrong.

Bandit boy colonel posing for the camera.

Mrs. Villa personifies preparedness.

A Villa mascot and two guards.



Soldier of fortune and many battles.

CAPT. FOULOIS, DEAN OF THE AERIAL CORPS

IT is no new experience for Capt. Benjamin D. Foulois, dean of the United States army Aerial Corps, to fly over Mexican troops or Mexican soil. Back in the spring of 1911 he did both—and more: he took a high dive into the Rio Grande, plunging deep into the mud on the Mexican side, whence he had to be pulled out by a Mexican lasso and a Mexican mustang.

With the experience he had that year with the late Phil Parmelee in flying over the meanders of the river between Laredo and Eagle Pass it may be said that there is no officer in the American army who knows better than Foulois the hazards of flying after Pancho Villa.

Aviators who have instructed Foulois and followed his career say that no more competent officer could have been selected to command the First Aero Squadron, now on the great Chihuahua desert with Gen. John J. Pershing's expeditionary column.

"He's as brave as a herd of wildcats," says Frank T. Coffyn, now with the Burgess Company, but who flew with Foulois in a Wright machine on scout duty with the maneuvre division at San Antonio in 1911. Foulois is probably the oldest flier in point of service in any army in the world. His first flight antedates that of any army aviator now flying in Europe. I regard him as the best aviator in Uncle Sam's service. The reports of the Signal Corps give the same estimate of his ability."

Officers of the Signal Corps, of which the aviation section is a branch, will be very keen for news of the operation of the aircraft. Their hopes are staked upon Capt. Foulois, following the attacks made upon army aviation in the recent hearings on the question of national defence.

The man to whom the army looks to vindicate the aviation service is 35 years old, a native of Connecticut and rose in the army from the ranks. As a private he saw service in the Philippines with the Nineteenth Infantry. After getting his commission he was assigned to the Seventeenth Infantry.

A student of aviation since 1909, he was the second United States army officer to fly in a heavier than air machine. Lieut. Lahm, now of the Sixth Cavalry, was the first. When Lieut. Selfridge was killed at Fort Myer, Virginia, in a fall with Orville Wright, Foulois instead of Selfridge had been scheduled to go on the flight, but something had interfered with the plans and he escaped.

Because of his light weight Foulois, then a Lieutenant, was selected by Wright as his passenger in the first army test flights from Fort Myer to Alexandria, Va., a distance of seven miles.

After a minimum of instruction by the Wrights, Foulois took charge of the army biplane at San Antonio and there he taught himself to fly. In that peculiar atmosphere flying is at its worst. Hot currents of air thrust upward from the earth and catch the aviator unawares. Air pockets engulf him. So sensitive to changes of temperature is the atmosphere that the passage of a big rolling Gulf cloud above the plane hammers the machine downward in a current of cold.

It was in February, 1911, that Robert J. Collier of New York lent his Wright biplane of the old B type to the Government for manœuvres on the border. Phil Parmelee was sent along to instruct Foulois in handling the new machine. They made a successful flight from Laredo to Eagle Pass, passing partly over Mexican soil, while Mexican troops rushed about below shouting, "Aeroplano! aeroplano!"—the first they had ever seen. On the return flight to Laredo they had engine trouble and dropped into four feet of Rio Grande mud and water near the Mexican side.

The Chihuahua desert, inhabited by coyotes, prairie dogs and rattlesnakes, is the worst possible flying ground, for landing places are rare. The terrain is rugged, the surface covered with cactus, low brush, Spanish dagger and other spiky growths and scarified with arroyos (ravines) and eroded rock formations. The mountainous sections are most desperate from the flier's point of view, broken and twisted by volcanic upheavals.

The atmospheric difficulties are those of southwest Texas multiplied. Even at this season the daylight temperature is 96 degrees. All sorts of crazy air currents snake through the heavens and wrench at the planes. Giant whirlwinds play over the desert, sucking sand and trash thousands of feet into the air until the top of the transparent chimney disappears cloudward.

Capt. Foulois and Phil Parmelee starting on a 150 mile flight from Laredo, Tex., to Eagle Pass.

Capt. B. D. Foulois. Photos by James H. Hare.

BREAKING A BAD HABIT

THREE or four men were talking about breaking bad habits and giving their experiences.

"Did I ever master a bad habit?" responded a very active business man when the question was put up to him. "I did, but I had to have some outside assistance, though I didn't ask for it.

"Once upon a time I had the bad habit of eating three meals a day, and I had to have them or there was trouble for somebody. There must be coffee at breakfast must be just so or there was trouble, the bacon must be properly crisp or there was trouble, the toast had to be correctly brown or there was trouble; the eggs could not vary from standard or there was trouble. The other meals I was not so superexcellsive about. But I must have my smoke after each one. It was trouble all around going and coming, because I suffered no less than those about me.

"That was twenty-five years ago, and I was in control of the situation and insisted on having everything exactly as I wanted it. It was an extremely bad habit and I didn't realize it. Then came changed conditions, and I was forced out into a world beyond my control.

"Everywhere I went I was called a crank, and my reputation in that line soon expanded all over, because I had a new eating place about every week or ten days. One morning, after I had been to all the feederies within a mile of my lodgings, a kind hearted waiter girl in a very nice little tea room I had discovered came down on me like a thousand of brick for finding fault with the breakfast she had brought me.

"She said I wasn't old enough to be senile, nor young enough to be afraid, and looked like I might be a very respectable person if I were properly trained. She was Irish and she wasn't afraid. Well, you know some men would have raised a row about talk like that from a servant to a guest, but I didn't. It struck me as the light struck Saul of Tarsus and I thanked her sincerely.

"After breakfast I took counsel with my better nature and resolved I would try to live up to the waiter girl's suggestion. Next morning I went to the same place for breakfast and had the same breakfast. Breakfasts vary, and this wasn't really quite what it should have been, but I ate it without a growl, though I did want to growl. I could see the girl was expecting the usual manner, but I disappointed her.

"As I left she looked at me rather curiously and smiled. I told her I knew the breakfast was just a bit sha, but I wouldn't worry, because I was sure it would be better to-morrow. And it was. At least I thought so.

"And thus it went for meal after meal, at one place and another, some good and some bad, but I had my mind fixed to take things as they came and I stuck to it. I went further. I resolved to give them up as they went, and if I missed a meal or a smoke or my coffee I consoled myself by thinking the next would taste that much better, and I laughed instead of whined.

"I will admit that it wasn't as easy to do it as it is to tell it, for there was a thirty year habit to overcome, and a habit grows mighty tight to one in that time. It took me a year to become reformed, but I finally got there, and now whatever other bad habits I may have, I haven't that one, and I don't have headaches or indigestion or a grouch, and there isn't a waiter girl I know who doesn't think I have the finest disposition she ever met up with, and what a lovely husband I would be if I would only marry."